

\wg\stone

Feb. 4, 1996

Notes on Stone's Nixon: Watergate, Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers

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To be sure, this story is not generally known, though more than enough evidence for it is by now available. And "Nixon," for all of its vaunted research, fails to contribute to better public understanding of it.

The effect of this is not just bad history. Properly understood, 1969-75 was a rare time when public opinion, activist protest and Congressional action really did make a difference to foreign policy: in preventing major escalations and in bringing the war, finally, to an end. (Far more than was true under Kennedy or Johnson, for example).

Yet that past effectiveness and future potential--the evidence for the power of political activity outside the Executive branch to shape foreign policy against Presidential wishes, and the responsibility and challenge that power poses--is ignored and actively obscured by this film, as it is in most academic and media accounts.

Ironically, more accurate tribute is paid to the power of these elements outside the Executive by Nixon, Kissinger and Haig in their memoirs than by Stone or others. Believing as they do (almost surely wrongly) that their strategy would not only have prolonged the war but would have won it, if they had been allowed to implement it fully, they finally broke their secrecy about the policy in the interest of blaming the loss of the war on their domestic political opponents.

I don't think they exaggerate the effects of that opposition on their policy, their actions, and on shortening the war. For once I think they are telling the truth, not producing self-serving lies, when they describe their earlier threats and readiness to escalate--delayed for fear of popular reaction--and their intention

and expectation of resuming US bombing of North and South Vietnam shortly after US troops had been withdrawn in 1973, until Watergate exploded in April and Congress banned spending on such action in August and November.

Whether that precluded a victory in Vietnam that was otherwise achievable, and whose human and political costs would have been justified, can be debated. I think they all continued sincerely to believe it, and many agree with them; I don't. But few in the media or among those in the Establishment who were not, by the end, fully supportive of the war are anxious to pursue such a debate or investigation, lest it furnish ammunition to those who accuse them of having helped to lose a war.

They prefer Stone's orthodox account: Nixon's Vietnam policy is adequately described as attempting to end the war as soon as possible in a way that would not lead to a right-wing backlash that would engulf the war's critics along with his own administration.

An alternative account:

Nixon did have a secret plan for Vietnam. It was secret from the American Congress and public, not from North Vietnam, the Soviet Union or China. It was secret because many, if not most, Americans would have opposed it, enough to block it. So it had to be concealed and lied about, and when the danger arose that those who knew the secret might reveal it to the American people [why wasn't there more fear of the Communists revealing it? Why didn't they? Have they ever done so?] extraordinary measures were taken to deter them, stop them or discredit them.

Thus a secret foreign policy led to acts of domestic cover-up, some of which were questionably legal or Constitutional, most of which were potentially embarrassing and some of which were clearly criminal. These acts of cover-up in turn had to be covered up, again by acts that were clearly criminal obstruction of justice...

In fact, it was this part of the cover-up that necessarily involved the President's interest and active participation from the very beginning, because people who were in danger of prosecution themselves were aware that the President himself had directed the controversial or illegal acts to maintain the secrecy of his foreign policy from the American public, along with the policy itself and the judgment that it had to be kept secret.

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He didn't want to discredit me as an authority because I was attacking what was already publicly believed to be his policy. He feared that I would be believed when I said he had a secret policy, and when I said what it was. He feared this because what I was saying (and had told to Haig and HAK a year earlier) was true (see my letter to the NYT in 1970, article in NYRB in 1971--see

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His secret plan remains today just as secret as it did then: despite Hersh, me, MHH... Not, as in 1969, by denials. By ignoring it (as they ignored NSSM 1). Their cover stories are not compared to my "hypothesis" of secret plan: that is not rejected, argued against, it is simply not mentioned, not considered as a possibility. This even though Nixon, and to some extent HAK (and very much Haig) actually assert it, announce it, describe many elements of it. Media and most scholars simply discard or reject casually their claims, choosing to regard these as self-serving.

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it was not because of 1960, it was because of September 1971 to May 1972, prior to Watergate.

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6) Specifically, what was the incentive to go beyond indicting me (to discourage further leaking--and again, why was that so crucial?) to defaming me (as, by the way, Stone furthers, in this movie).

(Stone gives more publicity to Kissinger's alleged (still unconfirmed by documents, tapes, or HAK) slanders of me than HAK or any other journalist ever did): without giving any publicity to challenge of these or to my explicit denials)--unlike Isaacson (who doesn't print the worst of the charges) or Hersh (who does), or even Haldeman, who raises question of credibility. (NO one points out that HAK's use of me as consultant post-dates these alleged sins).

How could defaming me discourage further leakers?

Why worry about my being a leader of the antiwar movement?
What could the antiwar movement do to derail the Administration efforts to "end the war"? And why worry about there being an antiwar movement, especially after the July 15, 1971 announcement of the opening to China?

(There was, in fact, a great lull in antiwar sentiment for the rest of 1971, despite the secret "protective reaction strikes". Patricia argued persuasively against my releasing NSSM-1; it couldn't do any good, especially with Congress about to go out of session. It wasn't till the renewal of open bombing in 1972 that she said: "Do it," and the lawyers agreed. This period was comparable to the fall of 1969, from November 3 to Cambodia in April 1970.)

[Why the concern about the 1971 elections? (My trial had to be delayed till after these). See account in Marilyn Young, and bearing this had on the negotiations at that time.)

Why the references, in E's notes, to HAK's "vulnerability," or "interest"? Apparently refers to HAK and the 1969-- wiretaps, on which I had been overheard: as he knew, from Hoover's memo to him. (Thus his knowledge of my "use of drugs")--though my consultation with him in 1970 was after this). (And--did HAK ever try acid, like Kahn and the Luces, or not?)

Stone buys the cover story that they were concerned about China. But this was going to be public before the plumbers could do anything; and the Chinese didn't care anyway, as Isaacson points out. (Publicity might have riled Hoover and the Right--though not, as Stone asserted in the original script, Helms and the CIA--just as the SALT leaks might have mobilized rightwing and Pentagon objections to SALT: just as the JCS spying on HAK might have done.

Another reason for keeping the existence of the plumbers covert; probing of Young or Ehrlichman might have led to their investigation of Radford, and revealed not only the spying by the JCS but the secret channel from the White House to Moorer, bypassing Laird, the existence and secrecy of which was intended to further the process of secret threats and practice of escalation, which corresponded to Nixon's "negotiations. I.e., "diplomacy" to Nixon and Kissinger meant secret and/or illegal threats and escalations, in the interests of effectively winning the war by means that the public would have rejected on various grounds, mainly of excessive human cost and poor prospects and risk of catastrophic enlargement (including nuclear weapons, which would scarcely have been imagined unless the actual threats and plans had been revealed: which Morris or I might have done).

Stone joins the line of the obituary-writers for Nixon in 1975 who let Nixon off the hook for his continuation of the war in Vietnam and his enlargement of the air war, and who fail to challenge his claims to have "ended the war."

Several times in the movie Nixon asserts his intention to end the war and then, his success in doing so. He complains that he is given no credit, no reward for ending the war: without anyone in the movie raising the point that he did not end the war, nor did he ever intend to. The war ended under Ford, almost nine months after he left office.

The treaty he signed in January of 1973--in the context of his highly secret assurances to Thieu at the time--allowed no possibility that either the war, American military and financial support for it, or even American direct combat involvement (with airpower) would end, either in 1973 or in the foreseeable future.

As Thieu correctly perceived, and Haig confirmed to him, what Thieu was being asked to sign was not a peace treaty, but a treaty to assure continued US support to a war (including combat

participation by US airpower). (Whether the DRV fully realized that this is what the US intended is not clear. Even if they did perceive this--which is probable--they probably would have signed anyway, for the advantage of getting US troops out, with the hope that this would make it impossible in the end for Nixon to carry out his promises to Thieu, and that even if he did, US air alone would not be enough to allow the ARVN to survive their attacks. They could have been wrong on both points, but they had nothing to gain by keeping US troops in the country by refusing a temporary ceasefire or hanging on to the POWS.)

Surely, the DRV would at any time--as Ho had said--have intited a ceasefire against US troops as they withdrew from the country. Indeed, they would have "strewn their path with flowers." And they would have returned US POWS. By early 1973, and surely much earlier, the great majority of the US public and even a Congress would gladly have accepted this deal.

However, there would have been no general ceasefire including ARVN, let alone any provisional promise of a permanent ceasefire, in the absence of a political settlement or a collaborative political process leading to a settlement, in which NLF participation in political power in Saigon was either assured, or likely, or at least possible, with the legitimacy of the NLF as a political factor in the life of SVN recognized immediately and throughout by the nature of the process. (This is what the January Accords promised: although Nixon secretly encouraged Thieu to disregard these promises, i.e., to violate the Accords without reproof of the US or recognition by the US that this would justify continued resupply or renewal of hostilities by the NLF/NVA without

What Nixon's promises to Thieu implied--and what Nixon, Kissinger and Haig expected, accepted, and planned--was the renewal of hostilities in Vietnam, with direct participation of US bombing, both in the South and against Hanoi--shortly after all US troops were out and US POWS returned in early April.

Why didn't this happen? Why didn't US bombing reappear in April, or later--thus leaving forever the general impression that the Paris Accords had truly been intended to and did bring about the permanent end of direct US combat involvement in Vietnam (though not in Cambodia)?

What forestalled the ending of the US ceasefire and the direct return of US bombing in April 1973--despite the totally-expected (by Nixon and Kissinger) violations of the Accords by both sides--was neither their understanding of the Accords nor any prior restraints by Congress. It was Nixon's understanding (shared by Kissinger, or not?) that the coverup was beginning to unravel, as Magruder and Dean began to talk to the prosecutors to limit their own liability or to get reduced sentences. That meant the

likelihood, and by April 15 the certainty, that Ehrlichman's and Nixon's involvement in and knowledge of the Fielding break-in and other crimes against me (in particular, the May 3 attempted assault) would soon be revealed by Dean, along with the bribes to Hunt to keep him from revealing the same crimes.

There was about to be a major escalation in the "partisan" struggle with Congress (another year was to pass before this struggle became "bipartisan," when Republican resistance to impeachment collapsed with the revelation of the tapes confirming Dean's allegations of Nixon's involvement in the cover-up).

Renewed bombing was sure to inflame some opposition in Congress, even though US troops were now out. The latter fact meant that this opposition would have been far less, and less decisive, than it would have been had Nixon continued the Christmas bombing longer, while US troops were still at risk and there was no prospect of a ceasefire that would get them out with dignity or get the POWS back, unless Congress had, in effect, taken over the process of "negotiations" and demanded a ceasefire between the US and the DRV alone while US troops withdrew in exchange for a return of US POWS.

But with US troops out, Nixon, Haig and Kissinger assumed that promises to Thieu--necessary to get his signature on the treaty (which in turn was necessary as a basis for carrying out the promises, i.e., maintaining indefinite US air support, providing a good chance for indefinite GVN control of the major cities)--could and would be carried out, starting in the spring of 1973, despite controversy and opposition in Congress and the antiwar movement (which was a remnant by early 1973). In other words, they expected this opposition to be easily manageable; and I feel pretty sure that they were right, regrettably. I believe that those who judge that such an expectation would have been so wishful and foolish that they cannot believe that Nixon or Kissinger can really (as they later claimed) held such expectations or intentions, are the ones who are unrealistic and who have forgotten the actual mood of the times. The Administration's beliefs that the American public was far more concerned about American ground troops and casualties than about the use of American airpower in the absence of ground involvement were, I believe, regrettably, more realistic than the retrospective judgements that--in the absence of the struggle between the Administration and Congress over Watergate--Congress and the public would "not have permitted" a renewal of air operations after US troops had departed, in support of "US honor, credibility, obligations to allies and implementation of treaties."

But Nixon and Kissinger didn't want (as the Time story in May 1975 put it) to fight on two fronts in April 1973, even though the foreign policy front might otherwise have been easily winnable. So they didn't carry out the secret promises in April. And then in May (Haig reveals) when Kissinger, echoing Thieu, urged desperately

that the bombing of Hanoi be renewed (after Dean's revelations had led to the departure of Haldeman and Ehrlichman and Kleindienst--soon to be indicted--and after my trial had been dismissed and Mitchell indicted) even Haig had to agree with Nixon that it was impossible to accept this recommendation.

Indeed, Nixon could not even get Laird to refrain from supporting a Congressional cutoff of all US bombing in Indochina as of August 15, nor bring himself to veto this. Contrary to Isaacson and others, I doubt that this House vote would have occurred in the absence of the Watergate breakthroughs in the spring of 1973. And even if it had, the Administration could have expected (as perhaps they did anyway, but with better basis) to get it overturned eventually, the the face of renewed Communist offensives, before the suspension of US air support could prove fatal to ARVN.

Thus, even the initial passage of this legislated cutoff in June 1973 need not have doomed the GVN to eventual collapse, except that the same Watergate struggle that had led to its passage was fated to continue long enough, and dramatically enough, to assure that the legislative barrier to renewed US combat in Indochina would be maintained.

Nixon always maintained that the Paris Accords would not have meant the collapse of ARVN or the GVN in 1975 or later if Congress had not prevented him (and later Ford) from sending US air support to ARVN. I believe he believes this (and may well have been right, at least through 1975 and possibly much longer), and thus neither intended nor expected the Accords to represent a disguised sell-out or bug-out or, indeed, a peace treaty that "ended a war" (except in the sense--all too acceptable in American political discourse--that large-scale hostilities that did not involve American ground forces or casualties may be described in the US as "peace"). On the contrary, he believed with considerable reason that his four years of continued combat, with 4.5 million tons of US bombs, over 20,000 additional US dead 100,000 ARVN dead, uncounted (vastly more) civilians and enemy troops, had bought the prospect of indefinitely prolonged GVN control of Saigon and the major cities and populated areas of Vietnam, despite permanent hostilities in rural areas in which ARVN, supported by US air as necessary in the South or against North Vietnam, could hold its own against guerrillas or renewed NVA offensives, at low cost to the US budget and no US ground casualties or involvement. South Vietnam would remain a separate country, with its principal cities and ppopulated areas under pro-American, anti-Communist control in which Communists would have no part. That meant the the achievement of the fundamental US objective since 1954, at a cost that had not prevented him from winning a second term by a landslide (whether or not most Americans would agree with him that it had been worth the reward) and with continuing costs that should be indefinitely sustainable by his successors, whether Republicans or Democrats.

By all who shared his expectations--which, I repeat, were not unreasonable or unrealistic, and which seem to me probably valid at least through the rest of his term (except for Watergate)--this amounted to US victory, a win. It had taken longer than he had expected in early 1969, and cost much more in US lives and political turmoil, but it had been achieved by the basic strategy he had secretly laid out in 1968-69, and he had gotten away with it, politically and in terms of sustained public ignorance of his true, secret aims and strategy, to a degree that I would never have imagined possible when I was evaluating options for him in late 1968.

(I would have expected his actual strategy--if it had been presented to me--to lead pretty much to what actually did happen in Vietnam and in the US between 1969 and mid-1972. Whether Nixon could have chosen such a strategy if he shared such expectations, I don't know; it's hard to imagine, despite his commitment. I could never have conceived--I don't know if he could have conceived--his achieving a landslide electoral victory after such events.

He couldn't have done it, probably couldn't have won at all, in 1972 if Wallace had stayed in the race: i.e., if Bremer, or someone else, had not shot him. With Wallace out of the race, was he sure to win reelection despite the continuation of the war? I wouldn't have thought so, in 1969 or 1970: but I might have been wrong, about the priorities of the American public. Once the Chinese and Russians had accepted the mining of Haiphong and bombing of NVN, the ground war (at least) was seen to be over. But what if the Russians had cancelled the summit, as Hanoi had expected along with Kissinger and most others. (Was this simply naive, unrealistic? Nixon, Haldeman, Haig and Connolly gambled, and won; but was this highly likely?). Then even McGovern would have had a good chance to beat him: as Nixon acknowledged. He was staking his reelection on this gamble: a measure of his commitment to preserving an independent non-communist SVN and maintaining US "credibility."

Nixon did not expect to pay this price for what he seemed to have achieved in the spring of 1973. But he almost surely would have been willing to pay it (in the form of US dead, Vietnamese killed, domestic conflict) if necessary, even if he had foreseen it. Or--if that is unknowable, or wrong--he was certainly not willing to change course and turn back from these costs after they had become clearly foreseeable. Nor was he willing to jeopardize the outcome or the continuation of the strategy by levelling with the American public, revealing his true threats, plans, promises, expectations to them and exposing his policy to political debate, electoral judgement, and possible repudiation. That, too, was his gamble (and his rejection of democratic or Constitutional process).

Without Watergate, I believe his hopes would have been confirmed, for at least the rest of his term, and possibly beyond

it. We would have continued to bomb Vietnam for at least several years; we might still be bombing, recurrently, today.

In the context of Watergate--which had been made possible, a danger to his Administration, precisely because of his Vietnam policy and his imperative incentives to keep it secret--he was prevented politically from carrying out his promises, his intentions, the actions he expected to take. And the possibility of a separate South Vietnam with an anti-Communist regime in Saigon persisting beyond two or three years was foreclosed.

I.e., given American laws, Constitution, and political traditions, and the costs the North Vietnamese and NLF were willing to accept and able to impose on American troops, Nixon's efforts to keep secret the particular strategy he had to pursue to achieve the aims to which he was secretly committed, gave him strong incentives to take criminal actions that posed some risk of his political downfall. The risk of exposure was small; but he had bad luck. It looked reasonably like a safe gamble, well worth the risk (and not a "crazy, incomprehensible" venture); but he lost. And his policy aims, as well as his office, were lost as a result. (Though he stayed out of prison and even out of court, and eventually was able to achieve a comeback in public esteem and to be lauded by five successors as President when he died, his Vietnam adventure forgiven: in great contrast, say, to Robert McNamara).

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[Why the concern about the 1971 elections? (My trial had to be delayed till after these). See account in Marilyn Young, and bearing this had on the negotiations at that time.)

Why the references, in E's notes, to HAK's "vulnerability," or "interest"? Apparently refers to HAK and the 1969-- wiretaps, on which I had been overheard: as he knew, from Hoover's memo to him. (Thus his knowledge of my "use of drugs")--though my consultation with him in 1970 was after this). (And--did HAK ever try acid, like Kahn and the Luces, or not?)

Stone buys the cover story that they were concerned about China. But this was going to be public before the plumbers could do anything; and the Chinese didn't care anyway, as Isaacson points out. (Publicity might have riled Hoover and the Right--though not, as Stone asserted in the original script, Helms and the CIA--just as the SALT leaks might have mobilized rightwing and Pentagon objections to SALT: just as the JCS spying on HAK might have done.

Another reason for keeping the existence of the plumbers covert; probing of Young or Ehrlichman might have led to their investigation of Radford, and revealed not only the spying by the JCS but the secret channel from the White House to Moorer, bypassing Laird, the existence and secrecy of which was intended to further the process of secret threats and practice of escalation, which corresponded to Nixon's "negotiations. I.e., "diplomacy" to Nixon and Kissinger meant secret and/or illegal threats and escalations, in the interests of effectively winning the war by means that the public would have rejected on various grounds, mainly of excessive human cost and poor prospects and risk of catastrophic enlargement (including nuclear weapons, which would

scarcely have been imagined unless the actual threats and plans had been revealed: which Morris or I might have done).

Stone joins the line of the obituary-writers for Nixon in 1975 who let Nixon off the hook for his continuation of the war in Vietnam and his enlargement of the air war, and who fail to challenge his claims to have "ended the war."

Several times in the movie Nixon asserts his intention to end the war and then, his success in doing so. He complains that he is given no credit, no reward for ending the war: without anyone in the movie raising the point that he did not end the war, nor did he ever intend to. The war ended under Ford, almost nine months after he left office.

The treaty he signed in January of 1973--in the context of his highly secret assurances to Thieu at the time--allowed no possibility that either the war, American military and financial support for it, or even American direct combat involvement (with airpower) would end, either in 1973 or in the foreseeable future.

As Thieu correctly perceived, and Haig confirmed to him, what Thieu was being asked to sign was not a peace treaty, but a treaty to assure continued US support to a war (including combat participation by US airpower). (Whether the DRV fully realized that this is what the US intended is not clear. Even if they did perceive this--which is probable--they probably would have signed anyway, for the advantage of getting US troops out, with the hope that this would make it impossible in the end for Nixon to carry out his promises to Thieu, and that even if he did, US air alone would not be enough to allow the ARVN to survive their attacks. They could have been wrong on both points, but they had nothing to gain by keeping US troops in the country by refusing a temporary ceasefire or hanging on to the POWS.)

Surely, the DRV would at any time--as Ho had said--have intituted a ceasefire against US troops as they withdrew from the country. Indeed, they would have "strewn their path with flowers." And they would have returned US POWS. By early 1973, and surely much earlier, the great majority of the US public and even aCongress would gladly have accepted this deal.

However, there would have been no general ceasefire including ARVN, let alone any provisional promise of a permanent ceasefire, in the absence of a political settlement or a collaborative political process leading to a settlement, in which NLF participation in political power in Saigon was either assured, or likely, or at least possible, with the legitimacy of the NLF as a political factor in the life of SVN recognized immediately and throughout by the nature of the process. (This is what the January Accords promised: although Nixon secretly encouraged Thieu to

disregard these promises, i.e., to violate the Accords without reproof of the US or recognition by the US that this would justify continued resupply or renewal of hostilities by the NLF/NVA without

What Nixon's promises to Thieu implied--and what Nixon, Kissinger and Haig expected, accepted, and planned--was the renewal of hostilities in Vietnam, with direct participation of US bombing, both in the South and against Hanoi--shortly after all US troops were out and US POWS returned in early April.

Why didn't this happen? Why didn't US bombing reappear in April, or later--thus leaving forever the general impression that the Paris Accords had truly been intended to and did bring about the permanent end of direct US combat involvement in Vietnam (though not in Cambodia)?

What forestalled the ending of the US ceasefire and the direct return of US bombing in April 1973--despite the totally-expected (by Nixon and Kissinger) violations of the Accords by both sides-- was neither their understanding of the Accords nor any prior restraints by Congress. It was Nixon's understanding (shared by Kissinger, or not?) that the coverup was beginning to unravel, as Magruder and Dean began to talk to the prosecutors to limit their own liability or to get reduced sentences. That meant the likelihood, and by April 15 the certainty, that Ehrlichman's and Nixon's involvement in and knowledge of the Fielding break-in and other crimes against me (in particular, the May 3 attempted assault) would soon be revealed by Dean, along with the bribes to Hunt to keep him from revealing the same crimes.

There was about to be a major escalation in the "partisan" struggle with Congress (another year was to pass before this struggle became "bipartisan," when Republican resistance to impeachment collapsed with the revelation of the tapes confirming Dean's allegations of Nixon's involvement in the cover-up).

Renewed bombing was sure to inflame some opposition in Congress, even though US troops were now out. The latter fact meant that this opposition would have been far less, and less decisive, than it would have been had Nixon continued the Christmas bombing longer, while US troops were still at risk and there was no prospect of a ceasefire that would get them out with dignity or get the POWS back, unless Congress had, in effect, taken over the process of "negotiations" and demanded a ceasefire between the US and the DRV alone while US troops withdrew in exchange for a return of US POWS.

But with US troops out, Nixon, Haig and Kissinger assumed that promises to Thieu--necessary to get his signature on the treaty (which in turn was necessary as a basis for carrying out the promises, i.e., maintaining indefinite US air support, providing a

good chance for indefinite GVN control of the major cities)--could and would be carried out, starting in the spring of 1973, despite controversy and opposition in Congress and the antiwar movement (which was a remnant by early 1973). In other words, they expected this opposition to be easily manageable; and I feel pretty sure that they were right, regrettably. I believe that those who judge that such an expectation would have been so wishful and foolish that they cannot believe that Nixon or Kissinger can really (as they later claimed) held such expectations or intentions, are the ones who are unrealistic and who have forgotten the actual mood of the times. The Administration's beliefs that the American public was far more concerned about American ground troops and casualties than about the use of American airpower in the absence of ground involvement were, I believe, regrettably, more realistic than the retrospective judgements that--in the absence of the struggle between the Administration and Congress over Watergate--Congress and the public would "not have permitted" a renewal of air operations after US troops had departed, in support of "US honor, credibility, obligations to allies and implementation of treaties."

But Nixon and Kissinger didn't want (as the Time story in May 1975 put it) to fight on two fronts in April 1973, even though the foreign policy front might otherwise have been easily winnable. So they didn't carry out the secret promises in April. And then in May (Haig reveals) when Kissinger, echoing Thieu, urged desperately that the bombing of Hanoi be renewed (after Dean's revelations had led to the departure of Haldeman and Ehrlichman and Kleindienst--soon to be indicted--and after my trial had been dismissed and Mitchell indicted) even Haig had to agree with Nixon that it was impossible to accept this recommendation.

Indeed, Nixon could not even get Laird to refrain from supporting a Congressional cutoff of all US bombing in Indochina as of August 15, nor bring himself to veto this. Contrary to Isaacson and others, I doubt that this House vote would have occurred in the absence of the Watergate breakthroughs in the spring of 1973. And even if it had, the Administration could have expected (as perhaps they did anyway, but with better basis) to get it overturned eventually, the the face of renewed Communist offensives, before the suspension of US air support could prove fatal to ARVN.

Thus, even the initial passage of this legislated cutoff in June 1973 need not have doomed the GVN to eventual collapse, except that the same Watergate struggle that had led to its passage was fated to continue long enough, and dramatically enough, to assure that the legislative barrier to renewed US combat in Indochina would be maintained.

Nixon always maintained that the Paris Accords would not have meant the collapse of ARVN or the GVN in 1975 or later if Congress had not prevented him (and later Ford) from sending US air support to ARVN. I believe he believes this (and may well have been right,

at least through 1975 and possibly much longer), and thus neither intended nor expected the Accords to represent a disguised sell-out or bug-out or, indeed, a peace treaty that "ended a war" (except in the sense--all too acceptable in American political discourse--that large-scale hostilities that did not involve American ground forces or casualties may be described in the US as "peace"). On the contrary, he believed with considerable reason that his four years of continued combat, with 4.5 million tons of US bombs, over 20,000 additional US dead 100,000 ARVN dead, uncounted (vastly more) civilians and enemy troops, had bought the prospect of indefinitely prolonged GVN control of Saigon and the major cities and populated areas of Vietnam, despite permanent hostilities in rural areas in which ARVN, supported by US air as necessary in the South or against North Vietnam, could hold its own against guerrillas or renewed NVA offensives, at low cost to the US budget and no US ground casualties or involvement. South Vietnam would remain a separate country, with its principal cities and populated areas under pro-American, anti-Communist control in which Communists would have no part. That meant the achievement of the fundamental US objective since 1954, at a cost that had not prevented him from winning a second term by a landslide (whether or not most Americans would agree with him that it had been worth the reward) and with continuing costs that should be indefinitely sustainable by his successors, whether Republicans or Democrats.

By all who shared his expectations--which, I repeat, were not unreasonable or unrealistic, and which seem to me probably valid at least through the rest of his term (except for Watergate)--this amounted to US victory, a win. It had taken longer than he had expected in early 1969, and cost much more in US lives and political turmoil, but it had been achieved by the basic strategy he had secretly laid out in 1968-69, and he had gotten away with it, politically and in terms of sustained public ignorance of his true, secret aims and strategy, to a degree that I would never have imagined possible when I was evaluating options for him in late 1968.

(I would have expected his actual strategy--if it had been presented to me--to lead pretty much to what actually did happen in Vietnam and in the US between 1969 and mid-1972. Whether Nixon could have chosen such a strategy if he shared such expectations, I don't know; it's hard to imagine, despite his commitment. I could never have conceived--I don't know if he could have conceived--his achieving a landslide electoral victory after such events.

He couldn't have done it, probably couldn't have won at all, in 1972 if Wallace had stayed in the race: i.e., if Bremer, or someone else, had not shot him. With Wallace out of the race, was he sure to win reelection despite the continuation of the war? I wouldn't have thought so, in 1969 or 1970: but I might have been wrong, about the priorities of the American public. Once the Chinese and Russians had accepted the mining of Haiphong and

bombing of NVN, the ground war (at least) was seen to be over. But what if the Russians had cancelled the summit, as Hanoi had expected along with Kissinger and most others. (Was this simply naive, unrealistic? Nixon, Haldeman, Haig and Connolly gambled, and won; but was this highly likely?). Then even McGovern would have had a good chance to beat him: as Nixon acknowledged. He was staking his reelection on this gamble: a measure of his commitment to preserving an independent non-communist SVN and maintaining US "credibility."

Nixon did not expect to pay this price for what he seemed to have achieved in the spring of 1973. But he almost surely would have been willing to pay it (in the form of US dead, Vietnamese killed, domestic conflict) if necessary, even if he had foreseen it. Or--if that is unknowable, or wrong--he was certainly not willing to change course and turn back from these costs after they had become clearly foreseeable. Nor was he willing to jeopardize the outcome or the continuation of the strategy by levelling with the American public, revealing his true threats, plans, promises, expectations to them and exposing his policy to political debate, electoral judgement, and possible repudiation. That, too, was his gamble (and his rejection of democratic or Constitutional process).

Without Watergate, I believe his hopes would have been confirmed, for at least the rest of his term, and possibly beyond it. We would have continued to bomb Vietnam for at least several years; we might still be bombing, recurrently, today.

In the context of Watergate--which had been made possible, a danger to his Administration, precisely because of his Vietnam policy and his imperative incentives to keep it secret--he was prevented politically from carrying out his promises, his intentions, the actions he expected to take. And the possibility of a separate South Vietnam with an anti-Communist regime in Saigon persisting beyond two or three years was foreclosed.

I.e., given American laws, Constitution, and political traditions, and the costs the North Vietnamese and NLF were willing to accept and able to impose on American troops, Nixon's efforts to keep secret the particular strategy he had to pursue to achieve the aims to which he was secretly committed, gave him strong incentives to take criminal actions that posed some risk of his political downfall. The risk of exposure was small; but he had bad luck. It looked reasonably like a safe gamble, well worth the risk (and not a "crazy, incomprehensible" venture); but he lost. And his policy aims, as well as his office, were lost as a result. (Though he stayed out of prison and even out of court, and eventually was able to achieve a comeback in public esteem and to be lauded by five successors as President when he died, his Vietnam adventure forgiven: in great contrast, say, to Robert McNamara).

Nixon's Vietnam War policy, and its need for secrecy from the American public, led to Watergate. Watergate led to Nixon's resignation and to Congressional majorities for budgetary restraints on combat in Vietnam, and made the war endable in 1975. (With no possibility of US air support under Ford--who, perhaps unlike Nixon, would not defy Congress (as Haig, at least, would have recommended)--RVNAF buckled under an NVA offensive that would probably not have succeeded, or would not have been pursued that year, if US air support in South Vietnam had available).

For direct US participation in the war, and the war itself, to be over in 1975 (or probably, by 1977) two things were necessary: Congress had to shut off funds for US air support, and Richard Nixon (who might well have ignored such a restraint: as Ronald Reagan did later, less blatantly, with respect to a cutoff on funding for the contras) had to be out of office. Both of these resulted from Watergate.

(Some would argue that Congress would have cut off the funds even without Watergate, pointing to the fact that the Democrats were ready to do this at the beginning of 1973, after the Christmas bombing. But that was before the Paris Accords had been signed, while US troops were still under fire and POWS were still in captivity. Once both the troops and POWS were home, by the end of March, I doubt very much whether--in the absence of the Congressional-Executive struggle over Watergate and Executive testimony--there could have been a House majority for tying the President's hands from "responding to Communist violations of the Accords" by bombing.

That is how Nixon and Kissinger saw it at the beginning of the year. I think they were right, and that those who, on learning two years later of the secret promises to Thieu to renew the bombing and, looking back through the perspective of Watergate, think that such promises could not have been sincere and could not have been carried out, are mistaken.

On Stone:
February 4

The history is wrong: in ways that mystify the motives and reasons for continuation of the war, the risks of escalation (from the beginning in 1969, throughout the period, and after January 1973), ignore the relation between Watergate and Vietnam, and deprecates, falsely, the role and impact of antiwar sentiment and activism and of Congress in containing the war and ending it.

(The November Ultimatum/Duck Hook and the Moratorium, fall 1969; ending the incursion into Cambodia in 1970; limiting the bombing of Hanoi to 12 days in 1972; averting the use of nuclear weapons, 1969, 1972; preventing the return of bombing, 1973; forcing the total withdrawal of troops, 1973; averting US air support in 1974-75, making the war endable by NVA offensive in 1975).

Nixon's secret plan had to be secret--just like Johnson's in 1964--because it was essentially the same plan (LBJ was relying on the threat of bombing the North then, he wasn't threatening or planning sending 500,000 troops), the same as Goldwater's (air support to ARVN, bombing infiltration routes and Hanoi, threatening nuclear weapons). As in 1964, if it had been public--as when Goldwater voiced it! leading to the largest popular-vote defeat in history--the public would find it too controversial, too costly, too dangerous, too little promising--it hadn't worked in 1965-68 (by 1968 not many would have agreed with the JCS and Nixon that tactical differences in scale and shock would make all the difference)--to be supported.

If they couldn't keep this plan secret, the Administration would be forced to abandon it, giving up their only hope for a possibility of success in their terms. Since they couldn't simply continue as before--even with reduced troops--with US casualties continuing into 1972 and hope to win the election (actually, amazingly enough, they did do just this, though I don't think even they could have foreseen this possibility, and as late as May 8 it rested on Soviet acceptance of the mining of Haiphong that HAK put at no better than 1/4 chance).

So if their threat-strategy couldn't remain secret--despite demonstrative demonstrations--they would have to give up their aspirations for success and turn to unilateral withdrawal or to a negotiated formula for a "decent interval" (hopefully, ending after the election), in which Communists had a share of power as well as a role in the electoral process in Saigon and the major cities.

Most people (including, for example, Lake and Morris in the fall of 1969: see Hersh) would have regarded either of these as much better than what did happen, and better even than Nixon's and

Kissinger's hoped-for situation if it had to be purchased at the costs of the 1969-72 hostilities. This would include Nixon's Secretary of Defense and his Secretary of State! (So it's not just "hindsight," as Isaacson suggests.

It was Nixon personally, supported by Kissinger almost alone in the government (with occasional kibitzing boosts from Haldeman, Colson, Connolly, Mitchell, and enthusiastic and increasingly influential encouragement from Haig, who would have preferred an even stronger policy) who believed that this strategy could be kept secret and that it would achieve the main goals of US policy in Vietnam over the last 15 years: keeping Communists out of power in Saigon for the foreseeable future, at a cost that the US could sustain politically.

Nixon was personally committed to this goal, and had been from its beginning in 1954. (By 1968 even Kissinger had given up on it, but like McNamara, he had only one Commander-in-Chief at a time; whether he really became as infected with optimism for the strategy he was carrying out for Nixon as Haldeman reports, or was merely acting the courtier, in an open question at this time; likewise, whether he thought the scaled-back strategy of 1972 involving US unilateral withdrawal could achieve the same ends by then, given US air support, or whether--as he suggested to Ehrlichmann--he saw this as a return to his "decent interval.

Nixon himself may have fluctuated, though his talk of going it alone without Thieu--which would have amounted to giving up, given his own predictions that would lead to cutoff of support by Congress--was probably mainly a way of putting pressure on Thieu to sign an agreement. What he did not, ever, give up on was the basic goal of denying Communists any share of power in Saigon. To legitimise their presence in the national government of South Vietnam, to dismantle the policy and process of implacable repression of Communist political activity in the cities and major populated areas of South Vietnam, he presumed would lead inevitably to their achieving political hegemony over time.

That had so long been axiomatic in Cold War circles in the US that for him to accept it would be to write off all his own and his predecessors' efforts and sacrifices as failed and wasted, stamping himself as a loser, the first President to lose a war. Richard Nixon, for both strategic and personal reasons, would do almost anything to avoid that.

No previous President had wanted that, either, and none had come to accepting it. But none had come into office when the costs of averting it seemed so high or the chances of doing so seemed--to most of those dealing with it--so low. Nor had they faced a political environment so little likely to charge a new Administration with "defeat" (unless it was the situation of LBJ

just after his landslide victory in 1964!). But Nixon--no more than LBJ--had no desire to exploit that margin of tolerance.

And he believed there really was a way to avert that, with much greater promise than anyone else realized. But precisely because they didn't realize it, it had to be kept secret from the public and even from most members of his own Cabinet, lest if be blocked by bureaucratic sabotage (by Laird), or by Congressional action, just as it had to be kept secret during the campaign of 1968 lest he be denied office.

Extraordinary measures--constituting clearcut violations of the Constitutional war powers and power of the purse of Congress--were taken to keep secret from Congress the bombing of Cambodia, and later the renewal of bombing of North Vietnam in the fall of 1971.

The Cambodian bombing remained effectively "secret" even after it had been described accurately in a front-page story in the New York Times: simply because Administration spokesmen denied the story, leading other media to ignore it. (The release of the Pentagon Papers, followed by Watergate, did change the environment in which news-control was as easy and reliable as that for the Executive branch. Yet dangerously abusive secrecy hardly became impossible. It was months after the release of the Pentagon Papers in June of 1971 that Nixon and Kissinger renewed bombing of North Vietnam using the same system of double-bookkeeping used for Cambodia and equally successful deception of Congress and the public

But if the New York Times story in May 1969 did not alert the public to the Cambodian bombing, it did inflame the White House into instituting the illegal program of warrantless and off-the-FBI-books wiretaps on NSC officials and newsmen, which in turn had to be kept secret, even within the Administration, and which exposed high officials to blackmail from all who knew of it (starting with J. Edgar Hoover).

The "cancer on the Presidency" had appeared: precisely because of the nature of Nixon's chosen strategy of secret threats and secret escalations in pursuit of secretly-ambitious aims in Vietnam: all of which would have looked (by 1969) so dangerous, unpromising and unnecessary to almost anyone other than Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger that it had to be kept extraordinarily secret from the public to remain political feasible.

Despite comparable lies and secrecy that permitted invasions of Cambodia in 1970 and of Laos in 1971 to be presented to the public as startling faits accomplis, the public responses in each case made dramatically clear the necessity of keeping the public unaware of a policy of secret threats--and its ambitious objectives, of forcing the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces

from the South (mutually with US forces) and preserving a GVN free of any Communist participation--which risked still further escalations.

It was in this context that the release of the Pentagon Papers, and my own role, looked so menacing to the White House.
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1w9\stone.3

Notes, Friday, Feb. 9, 1996

Young, 280: From February to August 1973, B-52s dropped 250,000 tons of bombs on Cambodia.

Between 1969 and 1972, as Nixon made war in the name of peace, 15,315 Americans, 107,504 Saigon t\government troops, and an estimated 400,000+ DRV/NLF soldiers died in combat. There are no reliable statistics on civilian dead and wounded, though one source estimated 165,000 civilian casualties in South Vietnam for each year of Nixon's presidency. (Thomas C. Thayer, War Without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam, Colorado, 1985: civ. est. 129.

Ambiguities, necessary but neglected distinctions, confusions:

--between "ending" the war and winning it, ending it by winning it;

--winning the peace = winning the war. "Ending" it in a way that "preserves American honor, and American credibility, American loyalty to allies" = preserving an anti-Communist, pro-American regime in Saigon and the major cities indefinitely, at a cost in American military and economic support--primarily, US air support to ARVN and the threat or implementation of air attacks on Hanoi and NVN--that is politically sustainable in the US indefinitely.

--"negotiation" = threats of bombing, unless certain terms are agreed to, or actions taken (removal of Northern troops) or not taken (occupation of Hue in 1972...).

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--"enforcing an agreement, by sanctions" = bombing North Vietnam for carrying on hostilities or resupplying more than agreed to, even though the GVN--with the prior encouragement and subsequent approval of the US--did the same and totally refused to carry out any of the political provisions of the agreement. (No "enforcement" of SVN's part of the agreement).

--"Ending the war" = "Ending US involvement in the war" = "Ending US combat participation in the war" = Ending US ground combat operations and presence in South Vietnam: while greatly increasing the bombing of Cambodia (till stopped by Congress as of August 15, 1973) and maintaining very large airpower and support presence in the vicinity, on carriers and in Thailand, with the intent and expectation of resuming air operations both in South Vietnam and against Laos and North Vietnam shortly after US ground troops departed in March, 1973 (postponed, and eventually precluded, by the Watergate struggle in the spring of 1973 and thereafter). (Nixon and Kissinger were not resigned to their inability to carry these out even after Congress forbade funds for

this in August and November, 1973. This ban could have been lifted; or, they believed, bypassed or covertly ignored or openly defied, as Haig seems to have counselled).

--Various forms of "winning," or achieving "peace with honor", as distinct from victory as defined under LBJ (in earlier days) and as distinct from what actually happened: four years of conflict followed by complete military rout of ARVN two years after the departure of US ground forces and (as forced by Congress) US air: i.e., a two-year "decent interval" before Saigon became "Ho Chi Minh City."

Nixon did not expect or aim at "total victory," or "military victory", which might be operationally defined as the withdrawal of all Northern forces from the South unilaterally--i.e., without comparable or close-to-total (or at any rate, required) reductions or withdrawal of US forces; ideally, the NLF main forces and guerrillas would lay down their arms and give up the struggle, perhaps accepting some integration into RVNAF, accepting sovereignty of the GVN over all of SVN, both NLF and the DRV accepting the autonomy and sovereign independence of "South Vietnam" permanently (or for an indefinite, prolonged period) formally and practically.

[Though there was recurrent consideration to "bombing them till they gave in" (strongly preferred by Haig, and recurrently by Kissinger)--this being estimated to take between four and eight months, with six months repeatedly mentioned--Nixon repeatedly backed off from that choice, on the grounds that domestic support would not hold up for six to eight months. (Especially, with US troops still in-country and at risk). (October-November 1969; April 1970; fall 1971; Christmas 1972; spring 1973).

But what would their "giving in" have meant? Conceivably Haig still thought the above terms of "victory"--in particular, removal of all North Vietnamese forces from the South unilaterally (accompanied presumably by reduced, but not totally withdrawn US forces)--as a goal and result of such "pressure." But there is little indication that either Kissinger or Nixon regarded this as possible. That approach--or the modified forms of it, more limited in scale and time, that they actually practiced (while threatening more)--were aimed at achieving settlement on their terms, which fell short of this degree of victory.]

The main US proposal, till the spring of 1972, was mutual withdrawal, the simultaneous withdrawal of the NVA and US forces from South Vietnam. (Nixon "dramatically" modified the proposal of the LBJ administration that the US forces would withdraw after the North Vietnamese forces had withdrawn, six months after a ceasefire; he proposed that it be simultaneous.

But the DRV must not only withdraw all its forces; it must

observe a ceasefire in SVN, not only with respect to US forces (as they also withdrew) but against RVNAF (which was being enlarged and would continue to be supplied by the US), while the Thieu regime would continue to rule in Saigon. (Elections were held out as a prospect--as in 1954--but the "electoral commission" preparing for them would operate under Thieu, who under various of Nixon's proposals would step down a month or two before the election.

Why did it seem to matter to both sides so much whether or not Thieu remained in power after US ground troops withdrew? As the North realized, Nixon counted on the continuity of the Saigon regime represented by Thieu--as an "ally" to whose preservation the US was "obligated"--for him to be able to return to US bombing after US troops were out.

He couldn't get such a commitment past Congress, while troops were still there==especially after Christmas bombing (but even before, in October or November). But he figured he could get acceptance of it, as a fait accompli, once US troops were gone (and the North was "violating" the Accords). He would count on US media not noticing or reporting that Thieu was violating the Accords, too. (They didn't, in fact. Indeed, they hardly reported the political aspects of the Accords at the time). So the DRV violations would be perceived as "unprovoked": like their August 2 attack in the Tonkin Gulf. (And the claimed August 4 "attack").

HAK was recommending US attacks on Hanoi already in March: but US troops were not all back, nor POWs back. So N considered only attacking Laos (he was mad at HAK not being in Washington for this decision. And WG was already falling apart).

On April 14, N, Haig and Haldeman discussed the VN problem (N diary, RN): probably they were deciding (with US troops out) to bomb, as Time Mag. reported in 1975. (Get tape). But on April 15, Dean told the prosecutors of the President's involvement in the Fielding break-in; Petersen told N on the 16th (or 15th), and was told to sit on it.

As was foreseeable from that moment on, that could hold only so long; it put Kleindienst and Peterson at the mercy of Dean, and exposed them to obstruction of justice (so long as my trial continued: which Byrne seems to have estimated at "a month," as of April 5. It lasted just five weeks, though it ended sooner and in ways than Byrne can have anticipated.

So the Watergate Front was opening. That wasn't the time to open a second front, with bombing. (Though just days earlier, leaks via Reston and others that violations were pointing to renewed bombing provoked no outrage in media, Congress or public).

Still less was it the time in early May, after Haldeman and Ehr. had been forced to resign and the Ervin Hearings were about to

begin, when HAK told Haig that the President must bomb Hanoi. Even Haig could see that wasn't possible (then).

Yet even after Congress turned off the money, neither Nixon nor HAK nor Thieu seemed to realize that the game was over, or show panic about their ability to carry out the commitments to bomb, and thus to (have a chance to) protect their goal of a separate, anti-Communist regime in Saigon and other cities. Presumably they thought that, if Nixon survived in office (the tapes didn't become known till July, and even then Nixon didn't intend or expect to turn them over) he would be able to reverse or ignore the Congressional restriction. But Watergate didn't permit it; and Ford told Haig, in effect, that he wasn't going to restart that struggle (in effect, having pardoned Nixon, he was content to let Nixon take the blame for "ending the war" in 1973. Neither he nor Haig nor Thieu revealed the secret commitments anyway, till April 1975, so he wasn't under public pressure to fulfill them).

Did Nixon ever, even under the pressure of Congress and the antiwar movement, "accept" the likely prospect of keeping Thieu, or some anti-Communist successor, in office in Saigon for only 2 more years, as actually happened after the Paris Accords in 1973?

Would he have accepted such an assurance, even if he believed it, in 1969, or 1970-72? Did he accept it as late at 1972-73-74?

No. Never. "Accept it" here would mean agreeing to forego the option of preventing the prospect of the departure of Thieu or an anti-Communist administration in two years or less by US bombing (and by US troops through 1972, at high levels in 1969 and 1970). He would not go so far, to achieve or to be sure that Thieu would survive indefinitely, as to keep US troops there beyond 1972, into his second term. But he would not give up the chance to keep Thieu there indefinitely--by permanent US air "support"--perhaps even to get a second term (as he repeatedly said). He would not accept a defeat in Vietnam, even to win the election (as he said in May 1972: when a loss of the summit, with no progress in Vietnam, could really have lost him the election, until Wallace was shot: and conceivably even without Wallace! The war would have remained an issue; and the Democratic nomination would have been worth enough for Kennedy or Humphrey to fight for it; McGovern might, after all, turn out to be the stalking horse for ELK that Buchanan expected; so he really did take a gamble on his election by mining. He won that even before Wallace was shot, when the Soviets kept the summit on.

And the DRV was forced to accept a negotiated outcome in which they were not assured of toppling Thieu or achieving anyt of their objectives: except to get US troops out. So the mining, with SU acceptance, did pay off big for Nixon: though HAK had wanted to call off the summit (Haldeman was not only "involved"; his advice won out over HAK, and he was right, and he won, along with

Connolly, Mitchell).

Hunt, Fielding and the End of Bombing:

(Dean discussed this with the President on March 20, and again March 26. E says he had discussed it with President--including implications of Hunt's involvement--on June 1972, after the arrests; and concludes, as does HRH, that N had directed break-in (and presumably got a readout on it at the time. Probably Haig got this from Young and gave it to HAK at the time; if Young didn't tell HAK directly. Could it be that Ehrlichmann didn't discuss this with the President after the event, at the time? He certainly knew of it afterwards: pictures: why wouldn't he tell President? But if he did, why hasn't he ever claimed it?b bHowever, if President did direct it--through Colson, as on May 3, 1972--presumably Colson would have told him of outcome. There is no testimony (?) however, that Colson was debriefed on outcome. On the other hand, he was dealing with Hunt after that on the Diem cable, and presumably on the profiles; so Hunt must have told him about the break-in, even if he didn't show the pictures (which were irrelevant; and Colson himself says he was just too busy to look at them when Hunt came back and offered them. Of course, he denies that he had any reason to think they showed anything illegal. But if he had, he would have looked at them anyway.

Of course, Colson denies every case when he might have been a channel from the President for illegal activities: thus protecting both himself and the President (May 3; Gemstone; Fielding; Diem cable (in which N was clearly personally interested) (and in which it is obvious that Colson was directing it, as Hunt says, and in which he flat lied to the WGSPF and elsewhere), and entries into the Watergate (and clemency offers to Hunt, along with bribes). (Who did pay Hunt between March 26 and March 28--sentencing--or his later appearance before Grand Jury; and where did the money come from?)

Irony: as N says in his memoirs, he undoubtedly did think of the actions against me as "national security" and still does, which gave him a clean conscience: "he would do the same things again, in same circumstances"!

But he didn't want that judgment tested, in public opinion or in court.

The very fact that it was "national security" was dangerous for him, the fact that it wasn't "the campaign" (see N to Dean and to E on March 26) because that pointed to him as the sponsor, not, plausibly, either Mitchell or Ehrlichmann! (It explains HAK's involvement as pusher of efforts against me; Ehrlichman, perhaps Haldeman, even Hunt, opposed my trial (Liddy too?) though not the

covert ops against me; but none of them would have known why it was so important to get me; they wouldn't have taken any risks to do it, even if they hated me).

Stone (orthodox, Establishment) view of antiwar movement and Congress:

--It had no effect on the course of the war.

It had no effect on reducing dangers of catastrophe (use of nuclear weapons, war with China), or casualties on either side, or length of war, or the likelihood or occurrence of escalation (short of above: hitting dikes, fire-bombing of cities or carpet-bombing, invasion of North Vietnam (which probably would have been in category of catastrophes, and led to nuclear weapons and perhaps war with China)).

It would have nice--even, preferable, more moral, less humanly costly--for Nixon to have arranged to end the war by 1969 or 1971 (US troops out earlier), or for the antiwar movement and sentiment to have forced him to do that. But it didn't (obviously), and could not have (probably true). He got out at his own schedule, about when he planned to, regardless of public pressure.

Or rather--he set reasonable, understandable, moral conditions on his schedule--POWS back, Thieu not to be displaced immediately, ARVN (and US troops) not to be under fire as US troops leave--which the DRV were not reasonable enough or flexible enough or realistic enough to accept, even though if these conditions had been met they would have been in power in about two years, with Nixon's reluctant acquiescence (no renewal of US bombing at that point, or earlier).

[Sunday: I.e., the DRV is seen as having turned down, from 1969-72, the very agreement they signed in 1973 (Peter Rodman makes this precise, totally false statement, in National Review this week, in a comment on the movie. Moreover, while Rodman understands this 1973 agreement to have included the prospect of continued bombing for "violations of the ceasefire" (by the North, not by the South), most do not. The usual interpretation, which the Nixon administration encouraged, is that the North had steadily turned down an offer, from 1969 on, to let events take the precise course they took from January 1973 to May 1975: that was too slow, or too bloody, to satisfy the Communists. They wanted the total victory of May 1975 to be handed to them immediately and without further violence--whether in mid-1969 or whenever (prior to their grabbing it violently in the spring of 1975) by US betrayal of their allies. Otherwise they wouldn't give back the POWS, or even promise not to attack US troops as they left. If they couldn't have total victory immediately, they preferred to fight on till the US gave it to them. Why? given the casualties they were taking as the US refused either to overthrow Thieu for them or to remove US troops altogether unilaterally and quickly? Why not compromise, "negotiate seriously" rather than demand the US act so dishonorably? (i.e., act as we had in earlier coups, including that

against Diem, or in installing Diem; or, abandon our--growing number of--POWS; or depart under fire). (Note what Reagan did in Lebanon. But he accompanied it by attacking Grenada).

The only plausible answer would be that they didn't believe, or weren't sure, that they could ever win militarily or politically over Thieu once we were gone. But that's absurd.

More likely (why they did turn down something like this in mid-1971: they weren't sure they could win quickly and cheaply enough with Thieu-plus-US-air-support, compared to a situation where US had made the symbolic and substantive move of dropping Thieu (either in election, or by "resignation"/bribe/order ("time to move on: you know what happened to...").

(It's absurd to suggest that assassination would have been necessary--that does have a dishonorable, murderous "aspect" to it when it involves a long-term ally to whom we have shown respect, like the Shah, or Diem (N was right, politically, to seek evidence that JFK had ordered or approved this, and JFK was right to deny it and hide any such evidence; likewise, even the assassination efforts against Castro, especially involving Mafia) (Still, the Presidency survived the Rockefeller Report).

Thieu was our flunky, when you come down to it. No big problem getting Ky out of the 1971 race, or Minh, even though Minh couldn't be bribed enough to stay in.]

In effect, the DRV is seen as "wanting everything handed to them, wanted a humiliating US defeat immediately" even though they failed to get this or to be shown any reasonable prospect of this year after year after year.

Given this DRV intransigence--which can be seen as patriotically reasonable or as fanatic and reckless and madly oblivious to consequences--and Nixon's understandable fear of the US rightwing and even powerlessness with respect to "the Beast", he had no choice but to "soldier on" until the DRV met his conditions, as they did in October or December 1972.

This schedule--perhaps longer than Nixon would have liked, but acceptable to him in preference to "humiliation for the US, loss of credibility and influence in the world" (i.e., on the basis of his understanding of "national security," along with domestic politics of the Right, not the Left)--was not affected by any antiwar sentiment or action: not in the streets, the draft resistance, the Pentagon Papers (even with his illegal overreaction, which did make him vulnerable to losing office: he had already "ended the war"), or in Congress or the media.

The movie is compatible with two interpretations of why the war "ended" when, according to Nixon and the movie (falsely) it did:

1) as Nixon and Kissinger claimed, the DRV finally met his conditions (which--as understood by everyone else-- offered, at most, a "decent interval" of one or two years before Communists took over; that's all he ever aimed at, and they could have had it years earlier);

2) Nixon and Kissinger may have believed, wishfully and foolishly, both that they could bomb longer than they did, and that this would have staved off Communist success for much longer, or indefinitely); and thus they finally dropped one of their key earlier conditions (withdrawal of NVA forces) without giving up their hopes for a longer interval.

It is true that both sides made major concessions in 1972. But neither accepted the other's major goal: Nixon did not accept the prospect of Saigon becoming Ho Chi Minh City either in two years or ever (without US bombing to prevent it); and the DRV never accepted the indefinite prospect of Saigon remaining under "pro-US," anti-Communist control, with Communists forever excluded from sharing power, in a separate South Vietnam. (However, they almost certainly felt no assurance of being in power in two years, and probably would not have been surprised to be held off for much longer than that).

Could Saigon have held on for more than two years without US ground troops, even if the NVA had departed (in a mutual withdrawal)? Well, they lasted two years even with the NVA in country, without either US troops or air support; surely they would have lasted longer than that, without NVA in South Vietnam and with US air support! How much longer is a question; probably not forever (e.g., till now); but on the other hand, possibly for a long time.

To be sure, RVNAF was smaller and less strong in 1969; but the NLF had been almost destroyed and the NVA was weaker then too, after Tet; and the Ho Chi Minh trail was not the highway it became in 1973-74.

Anyway, there was no chance of getting the NVA out; that was simply an unattainable goal, as appeared likely (to most) as early as mid-1969 (though Nixon and Kissinger didn't accept it, till 1971-72).

What difference would US air have made--with Thieu in power--without US troops, against NVA? Hard to say. Vann thought it could do the job (at least, with some residual level of US troops; did he think these were necessary indefinitely, or just till RVNAF had been rebuilt and expanded? Probably the latter; his point was

that ARVN with US air support did just about as well as US troops, at least on the defensive, and even on "sweeps," if they were willing to move out). (Check opinions in NSSM-1). Again: it certainly would have prolonged the GVN longer, into 1976 and possibly beyond.

It was Congress and antiwar sentiment (given the Vietnamese will and ability to fight), influenced in considerable part by the antiwar movement, that forced Nixon to withdraw all US troops by early-1973, and which, once US troops were out--in the context of Watergate--forced an end to US airpower as well. Nixon or Ford or Thieu or the South Vietnamese could still have turned to a political solution, ending the war with far less humiliation and bloodshed, but none of these was willing to do so, to pursue any but military means aimed as always at foreclosing as long as possible any Communist share in power in South Vietnam or unification.

As late as 1973 or perhaps 1974 (still more, earlier) such a political arrangement might have been stable for a period that would have been surprisingly long in the eyes of US officials. Even if anti-Communist leaders had been replaced by "neutralist, non-Communist" officials, RVNAF would have existed as a huge, undefeated and undestroyed political-military element, counterbalancing Communist military forces at all levels, whether or not it continued to enjoy US overt economic support.

But the refusal to contemplate such a political competition, and the inability of Vietnamese society to impose it on the GVN, meant the war would eventually be ended by--and only by--an NVA offensive, as soon as they were ready and as they and the RVNAF both realized that US airpower was not going to return.

What difference did the effective ban on continued US air support make to the war? If one supposes that Nixon, without Watergate or an antiwar movement in Congress or the streets, would still not have carried out his promise to Thieu at all, then no difference. But I think his promises were not at all bluffs. He never intended to leave the GVN without necessary US air support, not in 1969 or later, and he did not come to accept this possibility in 1973. He would, I believe, almost surely have renewed US bombing attacks (as Kissinger recommended) in April or May of 1973, without Watergate (in which his own critical exposure derived from his concern about the responses of the antiwar movement and public and Congress, if his intentions and strategy had been accurately perceived, and from the illegal actions he directed to keep his strategy secret from the public, while well known to his adversaries). (Indeed, without the effectiveness of the movement earlier, he would not have removed US troops in 1973).

Without Watergate, would the country have permitted him, at most, one last big raid, like the Christmas bombing, with a cutoff

then following? If Watergate prevented only that, its effects on the overall course of events would be relatively small. I think it more likely that, once US troops were out, the media and Establishment, and most of the public as well, would have accepted US aerial "enforcement of the Accords" with a good deal of equanimity. Nixon sometimes misjudged public reaction, but not all that often, and I don't think he was wrong about this. Not only the "responsible" media and leadership but much of the public is dishearteningly (to me) tolerant of US bombing, if it is not accompanied by troop casualties (and casualties or POWS among aircrews are low).

It seemed to me at the time, and still does, that a crucial element in Congressional activism in cutting off the bombing of Cambodia and then forbidding all expenditure for combat in Indochina was that this was one of the few ways of getting back at an Administration that was increasingly arrogant and intransigent in obstructing what seemed increasingly clear to have been abuses of domestic power in Watergate. In other words, Congress chose to assert its prerogatives in an unprecedented way in wartime policy in the face of egregious Executive challenge to quite traditional Congressional investigative prerogatives. Without that challenge, I'm sorry to say, I doubt that the residual antiwar movement could have mobilized enough public concern about bombing, once troop casualties had been eliminated, to have forced Congress to forego its traditional deference to the President in military and foreign policy matters.

But the challenge was not a coincidence. The Administration could not afford to be forthcoming to a Congressional investigation, because it had a lot to hide, a lot that was embarrassing and a lot that was criminal, and the part that most involved the President himself (and led to much of the criminal coverup by the President and others) derived from the need to keep his wartime policy secret from a public that had been aroused for years by activists as well as by US casualties.

That is not to say that the activists were ever popular or even seen positively, nor to say that they would have been very numerous or effective without the existence of a draft and of sizeable US casualties. But what created a focus on and an unusual sensitivity to both US costs and casualties and the long-run prospects of success from early on was that from the very beginning of large-scale US involvement in early 1965 there was enough reasoned and informed questioning and criticism from students and some scholars as to make Administration arguments for the necessity or even the legitimacy of the war effort and for its prospects of success seem unconvincing. Thus the continued and growing US casualties and the lack of success, in the face of Administration reassurances and talk of commitment, begin to seem intolerable, and to spark even Congressional and Establishment resistance, much sooner and more intensely than if there had been no such activism

at the outset and throughout.

And this war didn't bear much looking at. Even those (like myself) who started with an assumption of US good intentions and justified involvement could quickly conclude that US deaths and killing by US troops and bombers was serving no good purpose and should end, thus that the continuation of the US military operations was illegitimate. And as the USG refused to quit in the face of widespread public willingness and even demand to do so, many (like myself) were led to look still deeper at the historical roots of US involvement and the patterns of US foreign policy and conclude (as some radical thinkers had recognized from the beginning) that the US effort had been wrong from the start. This is not, by the way, the conclusion of a tiny minority, despite a generation of efforts to counteract the "Vietnam syndrome"; polls have consistently shown since 1969-70 that a sizeable majority of the public holds this view: or at least, that the US was mistaken to get involved in Vietnam from the beginning, and immoral to continue, if not from the beginning, after the war became obviously--to nearly everyone but Nixon, Kissinger and Haig--both large and hopeless.

RN: as of November-December 1972:

--Hanoi undoubtedly knew, from penetration of GVN, that Nixon expected the Senate to cut off all funds for the war in January, if an acceptable settlement had been and was being offered by the DRV and Thieu was the obstacle to it.

--As of this time, this was true; though Nixon was confident that Thieu would come through by the end of December--and expected to do so--(without any further assurances or bombing by the US: he simply had no choice, given the above).

--However, Hanoi might for this reason try to stall till January and until Congress cut off all funds, thereby really ending the war (as in June, 1973: without Watergate)

--(above, 718, 732,

--They might do this by appearing to "react" to Thieu's and the US's intransigence and backing away from Oct. 8; this could look reasonable (in fact, it might be all they were doing--waiting for the US to go back to Oct. 8)

--If the US did go back to Oct. 8 and forced Thieu to comply, and then the DRV didn't come back to it, the US would look very bad (? Haig)

--Maybe, the US wouldn't then have time left, before January

return of Congress, to bomb them into it.

f--So, purpose of December 18 bombing raids was to make it appear that it was Hanoi, not Saigon, who had backed off agreement; and meanwhile, to assure that Hanoi would not want to stall beyond December 30 but would agree to Oct 8 before Congress returned.

--Was Nixon serious in his diary that he might go it alone, if Thieu wouldn't sign? Had he at all changed his confidence that T would sign? And if Thieu wouldn't--how could Nixon "go it alone"? Perhaps because even a public break with Thieu, at this point, would be less bad than a failure to get any agreement, because of Thieu--which would lead to Congressional ban on all spending: the worst possible outcome.

--What was HAK really hoping to get by six months of bombing--beyond what DRV had already offered? Mutual withdrawal, after all--which is what Thieu was asking, and what Haig thought necessary?!

--Or: real observance by the DRV of the Oct. 8 non-resupply agreements, and perhaps ceasefire, despite lack of Thieu observance of the political accords?

[Note: RN doesn't pay attention to assurance that Thieu didn't have to obey political accords; though he does mention that he insisted that the military provisions not be made conditional on political accords! "These are separate." (Just what DRV had always rejected in the past: at least, as applying to a general ceasefire, as opposed to a bilateral ceasefire with the US as it withdrew: which the US had always rejected.)]

--So--Christmas bombing may have been partly a reflection of problems created by threats to Thieu of cutoff, made known inadvertently to Hanoi: need to assure that Hanoi would not "exploit" this knowledge; it wasn't clear that they were doing so, but they might be and might come to do so, and bombing would block this tactic and assure that the US got the Oct. 8 agreement--in the form it wanted (with secret assurances to Thieu--but wouldn't Hanoi know about these, too, with its penetrations? After all, Thieu wouldn't keep these secret from his officials, lest he be overthrown for selling out! So Hanoi should have known about these too! And Nixon should have assumed this! But bombing would soften them up to accept the "real" Accord, with its secret annexes, even though they knew about it! But then: why would they prepare their cadres for ceasefire (did they not? and "look forward to aid"? Did they? (They seem to have done so even after 1975! talk about wishful! Did they really expect this? (See Young)

\wg\stone.4
12 February 1996

What Richard Nixon meant by saying that his goal was "to end the war," and to do so with honor, has to be understood in the context of his frequent claim, in real life as in the film, that he achieved this goal with the Paris Accords, signed on January 23, 1973. No one in the film takes any exception to assertions that he "ended the war."

Richard Nixon didn't end the war, then or later. The war had not ended in the spring of 1973--nor had anyone in the White House expected it would--nor had it ended by the time that Nixon left office in August 1974. It ended almost nine months later, on April 30, 1975, when Gerald Ford was President.

In what Marilyn Young (in her excellent account The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990) has called the "ceasefire war," there were "26,500 ARVN dead in 1973, and almost 30,000 in 1974. Pentagon statistics listed 39,000 and 61,000 PRG/DRV dead for the same time period. Fifteen thousand civilians died, 70,000 were wounded, over 800,000 became refugees." That's a war. As many of "our" Vietnamese soldiers were killed in those two years of "peace with honor" as American soldiers in the previous four years, and twice as many on the other side.

Something had changed, of course. As Young goes on: "Throughout the war it had always been true that most of the corpses were Vietnamese; now virtually all were." But that hardly meant that, as Nixon is quoted as saying in the film, "our long and tragic involvement in Vietnam [was] at an end." All the bombs--still making refugees and killing civilians along with combatants--were American bombs, dropped by US-supplied and still US-serviced planes in what US tax money had built into the fourth-largest air force in the world. Along with their pay, the ammunition for ARVN forces--they expended 56 tons of it to every ton used by their opponents (supplied by Russia and China)--came from the same source. We were still "involved."

But had not American direct combat involvement been ended? No. American ground combat operations, casualties, and even presence ended as a result of the Paris Accord, and American officials had no intention or expectation that they would ever return. But that was not all true with respect to American air operations against South and North Vietnam, launched from carriers and bases in Thailand and elsewhere.

Nixon had secretly promised Thieu that US airpower would be used to respond to any gross violations of the military parts of the Accords by the other side. And Nixon, as much as Thieu, along

with Kissinger and Haig, fully expected such violations to occur, and Nixon's promise of renewed American bombing to be carried, sooner rather than later. In other words, their intention and expectation--not expressed publicly at the time the Accords were announced--was that American bombing and air support was not "ended" but temporarily suspended, for about as long as it took for American POWs to be returned and the last American ground troops to leave (which happened on March 29).

What Nixon called "peace"--confident that this description would be accepted by mainstream media and most of the public (though it is more surprising to find it echoed by Oliver Stone)--is better described by Young as the prospect of "perpetual war at an acceptable cost."

As Seymour Hersh has put it, Nixon's secret plan for ending the war was to win it. But that describes his secret aim more than his plan--he did also have a secret plan for achieving it--and it requires spelling out what winning it meant for him. ...

Richard Nixon's secret plan for attaining this had several novel elements, compared to Johnson's failed strategy. The first was to bring the Soviet Union privately to the bargaining table, in effect as an intermediary of the US, to press its ally and client North Vietnam to accept a negotiated settlement that the US regarded as "fair and reasonable," but which preserved the long-term US goal of a permanently separate, non-Communist South Vietnam.

The Soviet Union would be induced to do this by a combination of positive incentives--better relations with the US, arms control agreements, and trade including grain sales--if it did so, along with fears that if it did not, and no settlement was reached within a matter of months, it would be confronted by dramatic US escalation in Vietnam that would drag the Soviet Union deeper and more directly into the conflict. This would include, specifically, mining of Haiphong Harbor and a naval blockade of North Vietnam, which would directly affect and challenge Soviet shipping: a replay of the Cuban Missile Crisis, which the Soviets could be expected to want to avoid.

Thus, at the heart of this new diplomatic strategy were threats--conveyed directly to North Vietnam in secret talks and even earlier through the Soviet Union--of US escalation that would amount to the destruction of North Vietnam along with its ability to wage war, if it did not agree to US terms. Along with mining and blockade, Nixon had in mind threatening the resumption of bombing of North Vietnam, including Hanoi, this time with B-52s;

the possible invasion of North Vietnam; the destruction of dikes, which would cause massive flooding and famine; and the possible use of nuclear weapons.

The questions of whether--as H.R. Haldeman first publicly asserted--Nixon used the words "madman theory"--emphasizing the notion of his supposed unpredictability to the point of irrationality based on anti-Communist fanaticism--to describe his strategy or how much he relied on the explicit threat of possible use of nuclear weapons are distractions from the essential point of his secret plan: that it posed threats of massive escalation, going beyond anything done by the previous administration, which could cause the Soviet Union to use its influence urgently and effectively to bring North Vietnam to accept Nixon's terms.

But the terms he demanded were seen by Nixon as face-saving for Hanoi, involving what he saw as a large measure of reciprocity, while achieving the basic goal that the US government had pursued ever since 1954. Most or all Northern forces must withdraw permanently from South Vietnam, but simultaneously with this, and as all US POWs were returned, most US forces would leave South Vietnam: a process of "mutual withdrawal."

Meanwhile, there was to be a general and permanent ceasefire-place in South Vietnam. This meant, if the DRV agreed to it and carried it out, that there would be no military challenge to the permanent control of Saigon and the major cities and most-populated areas of South Vietnam by anti-Communist leaders unwilling to share any part of power with Communists or "neutralists", or to the permanent, separate existence of South Vietnam. This would mean acceptance of defeat by the Communists of their long-term goals in Vietnam: Communist power-sharing in the South, initially, leading to unification of Vietnam under Communist domination.

This departed from the most ambitious sense of American victor imagined by the previous administration in allowing the continued existence of Southern guerrilla forces in more-or-less acknowledged control of the rural areas and jungles they already controlled de facto, no longer subject to air attack or sweeps by ARVN or US forces and with no US ground forces in their country.

\wg\libel.\x
Feb. 26, 1996

Scene 6, Nixon, p. 103:

Nixon: "It's your people who are leaking to the Times. wasn't this Ellsberg a student of yours at Harvard? [No. I was never a student of Kissinger's in any sense.] He was your idea; why are you suddenly running for cover?

Kissinger: He was, he was. [See above. Ehrlichman's notes of June 17, 1971, record Kissinger saying to the President, with Haldeman and Ehrlichman present, about Ellsberg: "Brightest student ever had."] We taught a class together at Harvard.

[No, we did not. I gave guest lectures on three occasions, widely separated--spring of 1959, mid-60's, and spring 1968--to his Defense Policy Seminar at Harvard. Haldeman gets this right in The Ends of Power, p. 110: "Henry had a problem because Ellsberg had been one of his 'boys.' (He had lectured at Kissinger's Defense Policy Seminars at Harvard in the 1960s)."]

But you know these back-stabbing Ivy League intellectuals, they can't...

Nixon (cold): No, Henry, I don't.

Kissinger: He's turned into a drug fiend, he shot people from helicopters in Vietnam, he has sexual relations with his wife in front of their children. He sees a shrink in LA. He's all fucked up. Now he's trying to be a hero to the liberals...If he gets away with it, everybody will follow his lead. he must be stopped at all costs.

\wg\libel
Feb. 26, 1996

Statement in Nixon script, p. 103: Kissinger, on Daniel Ellsberg: "He's turned into a drug fiend, he shot people from helicopters in Vietnam, he has sexual relations with his wife in front of their children. He sees a shrink in LA. He's all fucked up...

A footnote to this passage in the published script, edited by Eric Hamburg, quotes John Dean in Rolling Stone, Oct. 4, 1994, as saying that he had asked Ellsberg "about Kissinger's charges. 'Absolutely untrue--all of them,' Dan said. 'In fact, claiming that I shot peasants is a horrible thing to say, it is the antithesis of my life. The contention is absurd. I find it particularly offensive because it is so contrary to what I believe.'"

The tapes on which Kissinger discussed Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers with Nixon, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Colson and others, have never been released.

The specific allegation that Kissinger claimed that Ellsberg had sexual relations with his wife in front of their children comes only from Charles Colson, as quoted by Seymour Hersh in The Price of Power, p. 385 from his interview with Colson.

"On June 16 [1971: three days after the New York Times began reprinting the Pentagon Papers], Charles Colson took two young Vietnam veterans, John O'Neill and Melville L. Stephens--both supporters of the White House war policies--to visit the President, and after a few moments Nixon summoned Kissinger. Responding to the cue, Kissinger gave what Colson recalls as 'one of his most passionate tirades. he described Ellsberg as a sexual pervert, said he shot Vietnamese from helicopters in Vietnam, used drugs, had sexual relations with his wife in front of their children. Henry said he was the most dangerous man in America today. He said he 'must be stopped at all costs.'" [end Colson quote by Hersh].

This is the only source of the allegation about sexual relations with my wife in front of our children (other references cite Hersh). But the other charges were repeated by Kissinger, according to Haldeman and Ehrlichman, the next day, June 17, in a meeting between Kissinger, Nixon, Ehrlichman and Haldeman.

Ehrlichman's handwritten notes of June 17 are the only contemporaneous record of these comments that have been released, since the tapes or transcripts have not been made public.

"(b) Ellsberg

K-- genius
brightest student ever had

shot at peasants
always a little unbalanced

* Drugs--
Flipped hawk to peacenik in early '60's

K hasn't seen for 1 1/2 year
except at MIT--
Heckled K"

Ehrlichman did not record anything about sex in these notes, and in his account in his memoir, Witness to Power, pp. 273-74 (Pocket Books, 1982) he is elliptical:

"Kissinger was passionate in his denunciation of Daniel Ellsberg. He knew quite a bit about Ellsberg's social proclivities (which Henry deplored) and Ellsberg's conduct in Vietnam...

"In the two weeks before he left on his secret China trip, Kissinger fanned Richard Nixon's flame white-hot. Time after time Kissinger warned about the dire consequences of 'letting them get away with this,' of having Ellsberg running around loose and of permitting the Government to 'leak like a sieve.' Nixon was warned about Ellsberg. He was not the sort of fellow of whom Richard Nixon would approve. Henry dropped tidbits about Ellsberg's private life and his use of drugs." [italics added]

Haldeman's account of the June 17 conversation, in The Ends of Power, pp. 110-11:

"I was in the office when one of the angry speeches was made. As I remember, it ended with charges against Ellsberg by Kissinger that, in my opinion go beyond belief. Ellsberg, according to Henry, had weird sexual habits, used drugs, and enjoyed helicopter flights in which he would take potshots at the Vietnamese below.

"Not exactly the Chamber of Commerce's Man of the Year, if those bizarre descriptions were to be taken seriously.

"By the end of this meeting Nixon was as angry as his foreign affairs chief." [italics added]

Haldeman takes pains here to distance himself from supporting the accuracy, or even the plausibility, of Kissinger's allegations, at the very least raising the question in a reader's mind. (This may reflect the influence of a libel lawyer advising him or his publisher: a helpful influence, from my point of view.)

Likewise, in the specific reference given in the annotated script for the sex-in-front-of-children allegation, Seymour Hersh

refutes most of Kissinger's allegations or publishes my specific denials.

"Ehrlichman's notes for that day [June 17, 1971], as published by the House Impeachment Committee, showed that Kissinger depicted Ellsberg as a half-crazed genius whose views on the war had turned dovish with excessive drug use and aberrant sexuality. [Actually, the notes do not mention sexuality, let alone the specific charge reported by Colson from the previous day; and "half-crazed" is Hersh's paraphrase of "always a little unbalanced."] It was a shrewd performance that played perfectly to the prejudices of Nixon and his two top aides. It was also an exercise in character assassination... Kissinger described Ellsberg as a "genius" who was the "brightest student" he ever had at Harvard. (Kissinger had, in fact, never taught Ellsberg.) Ellsberg was further described as one who "shot at peasants" while assigned as an embassy aide in Vietnam and who seemed "always a little unbalanced." (Ellsberg has emphatically denied ever shooting at civilians while in Vietnam). ...Kissinger told the President that he hadn't seen Ellsberg in a year and a half, except for the meeting at MIT at which Ellsberg had 'heckled' him. (The two had met the previous August at San Clemente and again a month later when Ellsberg urged Kissinger to read the Pentagon Papers.)" [Hersh, The Price of Power, p. 384]

On the next page, in citing Colson's account of the June 16 charges, which included the sex-children slander, Hersh did not cite my specific denials, feeling, reasonably, that he had sufficiently alerted the reader to questions about the reliability of Kissinger's claims on the previous page.

Another place referenced by the annotated script where the sex-children charge is repeated (citing Hersh), Nixon, vol. II by the historian Stephen Ambrose, likewise presents a statement by Haldeman, from an interview by Ambrose, that characterizes Kissinger's "performance" in attacking me as "beyond belief." Describing the June 17 discussion between Nixon, Kissinger, Haldeman and Ehrlichman (Ambrose, pp. 446-47), Ambrose says:

"So in the Oval Office, Kissinger proceeded to put on a performance that Haldeman characterized as 'beyond belief.' He was enraged. His paranoia poured out of him., It was "one of his most passionate tirades." [Ambrose footnotes these quotes to a Haldeman interview.] Kissinger said Ellsberg was a "genius," of the [sic] "brightest student[s]" at Harvard [sic], but a man fatally flawed. He was a sexual pervert who made love with his wife in front of his children. He was a drug abuser. He had once been a hawk who enjoyed shooting Vietnamese peasants from helicopters in Vietnam, but had gone from 'hawk' to peacenik.' He had in his possession critical defense secrets of current validity, such as nuclear targeting. Kissinger described Ellsberg as 'the most dangerous man in America today,' who 'must be stopped at all costs.'"

In quoting Haldeman and in describing this as a "diatribe" (in the next sentence), like Haldeman and Hersh and Dean--in contrast to the film as seen by audiences--Ambrose does flag the question of reliability. (In other respects, Ambrose's account does not meet the highest standards of historical citation. What he presents as a presentation made in front of Haldeman and Ehrlichman on June 17 actually includes assertions--including the critical one that Ellsberg "made love with his wife in front of their children" (a paraphrase of Colson's quotation of Kissinger's "had sexual intercourse with his wife," which appears in the film)--that according to the very source that Ambrose cites, Hersh's book, were not made in the presence of Haldeman or Ehrlichman or on June 16 in the conversation Ambrose is recounting, but were made in front of Colson and two veterans, according to Hersh's interview of Colson, on June 16, the day before. This is also true of the words "sexual pervert" and the reference to shooting from helicopters, neither of which appear in Ehrlichman's notes of June 17.

Likewise, Ambrose's referenced source for these statements, Hersh's Price of Power, pp. 384-85, citing Ehrlichman's notes, quotes them accurately and completely in saying that "Ellsberg was further described as one who 'shot at peasants'", following it by my "emphatic" denial that I ever shot at civilians. How did this get to be rendered by Ambrose, "a hawk who enjoyed shooting Vietnamese peasants from helicopters in Vietnam"? Since even Colson doesn't mention the word "enjoyed," Ambrose's source here--which he fails to identify or cite--is clearly Haldeman's The Ends of Power, pp. 110-11, which says, "Ellsberg, according to Henry...enjoyed helicopter flights [italics added] in which he would take potshots at the Vietnamese below." Ambrose's formulation of this is no less false to the fact, but perhaps a shade more slanderous. This may seem a niggling point to persons other than the one being slandered.

The editor of the published "shooting script" notes at the onset:

"In a few instances where facts are in dispute, the writers have used reasonable speculation arising from the information available. This annotated script reflects a sampling of the historical material on which the writers drew in creating this story of Richard Nixon." [footnote, p. 83]

For "the language of Kissinger's tirade about Ellsberg," the footnote reference to the script cites five works, by Ambrose, Aitken, Wicker, Hersh and Dean. I don't have the books by Aitken or Wicker at hand. But of the three I have seen and cited above, by Hersh, Dean and Ambrose, two of them quote my specific denials of Kissinger's charges and the third, Ambrose, cites Haldeman's "beyond belief" comment. So the writers were clearly warned in their research that these patently defamatory charges by Kissinger were, to say the least, subject to question as to their truth.

Yet their film script, as shown on the screen, gives no hint at all to the mass audience that viewed it that these particular defamatory statements might not be true. The skepticism actually reported by Haldeman in his memoir could easily have been expressed in one of a dozen ways on the screen. It is not.

There is an entire (invented) scene--Scene 91, pp. 258-61--in which Ehrlichman and Haldeman raise questions about the veracity or validity of statements that Nixon has made, and throughout the film characters challenge each other's statements or motives, sometimes jokingly and sometimes viciously. But not in the case of Kissinger's assertions about Ellsberg. Reasons are presented (not the real ones, I believe) why Kissinger would want to "stop" and "discredit" Ellsberg, but no suggestion that the charges he proposes to publicize are false. Kissinger is not presented in the film as a very dignified or sympathetic character, but the audience will be well aware that he became Secretary of State and received a Nobel Prize. (A major fault of the movie, in my eyes, is that it gives the audience no reason to realize just how ill-deserved that Prize was). Various personality defects of Henry Kissinger are shown, but not a lack of veracity, on this or any other subject.

Stone and his writers have given mass dissemination to a slander without any indication to a hearer that it might not be true, and without having made any effort whatever to determine for themselves whether or not it was true, knowing that it had been denied by the target. (Had they investigated, they would have not found a shred of basis for either of the charges, about sexual intercourse in in front of children or of shooting civilians, from helicopters or otherwise, with or without enjoyment).

Comments:

1. At no time in the development or production of this film, up to the present (February 26) has any representative of Stone, his writers or his organization made any attempt to contact me for any reason, for comments on the veracity of defamatory statements made about me. That is also true for my former wife, also seriously defamed, and my two grown children referred to.

2. This is in contrast to the experience of John Dean, who reports (in an essay included in Nixon, ed. Eric Hamburg, p. 4) that "a couple of information polluters and sleaze suckers had waded into the muck and mire of Watergate to produce a new revisionist account of the events." He is referring here not to Stone and his writers but to the authors of Silent Coup, which (on the basis of my own best judgment) slanders Dean.

"When I discovered fragments of this baseless revisionism in Oliver Stone's script, I doubted I wanted anything to do with the project. My doubts, however, were proven to be totally misplaced. When Oliver Stone learned the true facts (which he personally

checked by talking with the persons involved), he pulled the phony material from his film. Thus, there was no question in my mind about the sincerity and legitimacy of his effort to base the film on hard information."

It would be easier to agree with Dean's conclusion if I or my former wife and my children had had comparable experience, or even the opportunity to see portions of the draft script in advance.

3. My former wife is in no sense a "public figure," nor is either of my children. In fact, she long ago reverted to her maiden name for professional purposes, precisely to avoid unwanted publicity. She is a registered nurse and has a doctorate in psychology; she is head of a pain program at the Veterans' Administration in Los Angeles. Nevertheless, in her professional circles it is generally known that Dr. Carol Cummings is the former wife of Daniel Ellsberg, and the reference in the film has elicited a number of expressions of concern, and undoubtedly far more attention than has been expressed to her.

\wg\nixon.de
Feb. 13, 1996, Tuesday

Oliver Stone missed the real story. He focusses on Watergate--as the tragic downfall of a potentially great man, a Shakespearean figure larger-than-life [if anyone was smaller-than-life, it was Richard Nixon] of unlimited potential

[By the way, just what was this potential he didn't realize? A third term? He did think of that! That's why CREEP continued to operate after the election!

Winning the war cheaply and quickly? That's precisely what he aimed at, but he didn't have a chance: that wasn't within his potential, or anyone else's.

Nixon and Kissinger, have always been my favorite demonstrative examples of the flaw in Maslow's assumption that being fully self-actualized and realizing one's full potential--and loving it, to the limits of one's ability to have pleasure--is not necessarily good for others or fulfilling of what are generally recognized as higher values. (Hitler suggests himself as another example).

Surely they went beyond any potential anyone else had ever seen in them. Kissinger a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize?! Nixon a nominee for that, winner of a second term as president with a landslide?! The opener to China...followed by a Summit in Moscow, followed by the landslide? Universally recognized as a great statesman and foreign policy guru! Christ, even the first resignation in history, or impeachment, were fulfillments of his potential!]

Back to Stone...

who scaled the highest heights and plumbed the lowest depths: but the Vietnam War doesn't appear in either of those categories. It is off-stage, evidently engaging the emotions and energies of a lot of young people--pampered, elitist, self-indulgent, letting off steam on a convenient target, unappreciative of the complexities and frustrations the president is encountering in his efforts to actually deal with the problem of ending the war.

By making the war merely a background noise to the drama of Watergate and Summitry on-screen, Stone misses and implicitly denies the crucial linkages of Vietnam to Watergate. As H.R. Haldeman put it, without the Vietnam War there would have been no Watergate; and (as Haldeman himself probably didn't realize, along with everyone else) without Watergate, the war wouldn't have ended when it did.

Stone obscures this last point by showing the war "ending" months before the Watergate coverup began to unravel, putting the White House under siege. He misses the opportunity to make the audience aware not only that the war hadn't ended but that in Nixon's mind and planning, American combat participation in it--in the form of airpower, no longer ground troops, the Nixon Doctrine in action--hadn't ended. It was unprecedented Congressional action, cutting off funds for bombing, that kept US bombs from continuing to fall on Indochina, not the Paris Accords or Nixon's aims or intentions. And that action could probably only have occurred in the context of the Watergate revelations and the White House stonewalling.

That Richard Nixon had fatal flaws that led to his downfall was hardly surprising to anyone who had observed him during his long career, i.e., to practically any American old enough to watch politics in the Fifties and Sixties. He appeared to most non-Republicans as having nothing but fatal flaws. That he did as well as he did as President was the surprise.

Curiously, it isn't that easy for a viewer to say just what Stone thinks the crucial flaw was. He swears a lot, he drinks (both possibly exaggerated), he had a sad childhood, he wasn't talented at football...what do any of these have to do with Watergate? (What is it that Kissinger thinks he could have been, or achieved, "if only he had been loved"? The Nobel Laureate for Literature? Anyway, it appears in the film, as in real life, that he was loved more than adequately by his wife and children.)

The time spent on his childhood is clearly meant to suggest that it holds the key to his self-destruction: but where is it? His childhood experiences, as shown, don't even seem obviously related to his personality characteristics. A preoccupation with deaths? Eggregiously, the movie doesn't mention just how many deaths he dealt out! But in any case, what's the connection to the fact that his two brothers died?

Behind all this there is a dramatic story that Stone has missed, along with nearly everyone else. Haldeman was right; and his message has been ignored. It was not peculiarities of personality that led to the presidential crimes of Watergate and the need to cover them up. It was Nixon's Vietnam policy, in the context of a mobilization of antiwar activism and public sentiment which made it necessary to keep his plans and much of their implementation secret, that led Nixon to direct illegal projects with the aim of protecting the secrecy of his policy.

The need for secrecy arose precisely from the nature of his policy, which--contrary to his public claims, accepted by Stone in the film--was not at all accurately describable as "ending the war." The public heard, and was meant to hear, his qualification that he wanted to end it "with honor" as a face-saving, essentially

meaningless flourish. It was not that at all. What Nixon meant by "ending the war" was ending the direct combat role of American ground troops (not that of American airpower). And he was willing to do that only conditions that, from an American point of view, amounted to winning the war. Not winning it in the most ambitious sense ever fantasied by American strategists, but in terms that would have been recognized as "victory" by any previous administration (and which he privately called "victory" whenever he thought he was on the verge of achieving them).

He had to keep that intention obscure because by 1968 and 1969 nearly everyone in America would have perceived it (correctly) as infeasible, and they would have been intolerant of the deaths and disappointments they would have expected from further vain attempts to pursue it. Indeed, they would have thought it mad, by that stage in the war. Certainly any politician would have been mad to campaign on that program in 1968, and Nixon was not mad in that way.

When he told the public that he had a plan to end the war honorably, he carefully refused to tell them what it was; he allowed them to think, then and forever after, that he was just kidding, in the way of politicians campaigning. When he told people in the early days of office that he expected to end the way in six months or less, he allowed them to assume that he meant to do this in the only way they could imagine that could come about: a more-or-less disguised "bug-out."

By that time, there was no real opposition in the public, Congress, media or Establishment to that admission of failure. It would have been absurd to say that such an option was closed to him, that it posed insuperable, or even major, political costs or obstacles to a new Republican president, and no one did say that at the time. He was being urged and advised from Democrats and Republicans alike--including his own Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State--to take that course. But he had no intention of doing so.

His secret was that he did have a plan, which he was confident would achieve what almost no one else thought was possible; and for that very reason he had to keep it secret lest it meet with a barrage of skepticism and opposition at home (which would, he believed, actually keep it from working, by encouraging Hanoi to reject it, believing that he would not be able to it long enough. It had to be presented to the American public as a presidential fait accompli, benefitting from the grace-period that Americans always gave a surprising presidential military initiative, rather than allowing opposition to organize and build up even before the violence commenced.

So his plan, along with his aims, had to be kept secret after he took office. He carried it out, secretly (including an

unprecedented campaign of bombing against another country that, so far as the public knew, was not a party to the war; this he kept secret from the American press, without censorship: though the effort to do so led him to an illegal program of wiretaps on potential leaders and on journalists). He expected it to end the war, or the American ground combat part of it, within six months. It failed.

He then lengthened his timetable by four months, elaborated the plan and intensified his efforts. He set a deadline of 1 November, and secretly prepared to achieve his goals by direct violence if his secret threats failed. They did fail. And because of the concurrent antiwar mobilization, he gave up, for the moment, his intended back-up plan of full-scale war against North Vietnam.

But instead of reconsidering his approach and lowering his goals in face of this second disappointment, he extended the timetable once again, making it indefinite...

[He had to keep the specific plan secret, because most of the public would have judged not only that it, too, was likely to fail, but that it was all too likely, instead, to prolong and murderously expand the war. They would have been right; it was Nixon and, apparently, Kissinger, who were wishfully, foolishly, arrogantly blind to this. So they carried it, with individual acts being presented as faits accomplis, carefully and successfully concealing the goals they aimed at or the fact that they formed part of a pattern, a strategy, which pointed toward still further escalation ahead.]